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Ask the Developer



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10/17/23 Nintendo Switch

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Ask the Developer Vol. 11, Super Mario Bros. Wonder—Part 1

- This article has been translated from the original Japanese content.
- Some of the images and videos shown in text were created during development.

In this eleventh volume of Ask the Developer, an interview series in which Nintendo developers convey in their own words Nintendo's thoughts about creating products and the specific points they are particular about, we're talking to the developers behind the [Super Mario Bros.™ Wonder](#) game for the [Nintendo Switch™](#) system, which launches on Friday, **October 20**.

Check out the rest of the interview:

- [Part 2](#)
- [Part 3](#)
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Part 1: The theme of "transformation"



Takashi Tezuka (referred to as Tezuka from this point on): Hello. I'm Takashi Tezuka. I've been involved in 2D Mario (1) games in many ways for a long time, but I joined as the producer for this title. This year marks the 39th year that I've been involved in the development of Mario games.

(1) A term that refers to a side-scrolling 2D platformer in the Super Mario series. In contrast, 3D Mario games refer to Mario platformers in which Mario moves around in a 3D space.

Shiro Mouri (referred to as Mouri from this point on): Hello, I'm Shiro Mouri. I joined as the programming director for New Super Mario Bros. U (2) and the director for [New Super Mario Bros. U Deluxe](#). For this title, I served as the director again.

(2) A Wii U™ game released in November 2012 in North America and Europe. This side-scrolling 2D platformer offers a unique gameplay experience on the Wii U GamePad, which can be used as a second screen with touch-screen functionality. Yoshis, with various abilities, support their adventure. New Super Mario Bros. U Deluxe for Nintendo Switch, which included new characters and New Super Luigi U, was released in January 2019.

Koichi Hayashida (referred to as Hayashida from this point on): Hi! I'm Koichi Hayashida, and I worked on the game design. I've served as a director for games including Super Mario 3D World (3) and as a producer for [Super Mario Odyssey](#) (4) and other games. My mission in this project was to apply my experiences from the development of 3D Mario games to a 2D Mario game.

(3) A Wii U game released in November 2013. In this 3D platformer, up to four players can explore the Sprixie Kingdom, a land full of surprises, where new transformations, such as Cat Mario and Double Mario, were introduced. Additional accessories may be required for multiplayer mode. Sold separately. [Super Mario 3D World + Bowser's Fury](#), which includes new modes, was released on Nintendo Switch in February 2021.

(4) A Nintendo Switch game released in October 2017. In this 3D platformer, players join Mario and his hat-shaped ally Cappy on a globe-trotting adventure, exploring ancient ruins, big cities, and much more.

Masanobu Sato (referred to as Sato from this point on): Hi, I'm Masanobu Sato, the art director for this game. My first involvement in the development of 2D Mario games was when I created animation for the Koopalings, the bosses in New Super Mario Bros. Wii (5). I've been involved as the design leader since New Super Mario Bros. U.

(5) A Wii™ game released in November 2009 in North America and Europe. In this 2D side-scrolling platformer, new transformations such as Propeller Mario, Ice Mario, and Penguin Mario were introduced.

Koji Kondo (referred to as Kondo from this point on): Hello, I'm Koji Kondo. As the sound director for this title, I was responsible for the approach we took for the sound and for making the final judgment on its quality. I also composed some of the game's music myself. I've been involved in Super Mario games since the first Nintendo Entertainment System (6) game.

(6) A video-game console released in 1985 in North America. It came bundled with two controllers featuring a Control Pad and A and B buttons. Players could swap game cartridges to play a variety of games.

Thank you very much. Mouri-san, could you give us a brief introduction to this new game, Super Mario Bros. Wonder?

Mouri: Sure. Super Mario Bros. Wonder is the first entirely new installment in the side-scrolling Super Mario Bros. series in almost 11 years. Whenever you collect the new item, the Wonder Flower, the course and its gameplay transform dramatically, and a variety of "wonders" occur that would've been unimaginable in previous titles in the series.

So it's been almost 11 years since the release of the previous title, New Super Mario Bros. U.

Mouri: Yes. While Super Mario Maker (7), [Super Mario Maker 2](#), and New Super Mario Bros. U Deluxe were released after the launch of the previous title, this is the first new 2D Mario game in almost 11 years.

(7) A Wii U game released in September 2015. In this 2D platformer, players can create and play their own courses by combining different parts. The sequel, Super Mario Maker 2, was released on Nintendo Switch in June 2019.

Where did you get the idea for this new game, which has been a long time coming?

Tezuka: I was already thinking about what kind of Mario game we should make next when we were developing Super Mario Maker 2. At the time, some journalists and players were saying that Super Mario Maker had eliminated the need for another 2D Mario game. But I kept saying that the next Mario game would be completely different from Super Mario Maker, so there was no need to worry. In hindsight, those kinds of sentiments may have been what motivated me to come up with ideas for this game.





So during Super Mario Maker 2's development, you were already confident that you could create something completely fresh.

Tezuka: Well, yes.

Hayashida: No, no, I wasn't! (Laughs) Players have created so many different courses in Super Mario Maker and Super Mario Maker 2 that I was worried about whether we could do anything new that would go beyond that. ...But apparently, Tezuka-san thought it would be fine. (Laughs)

Tezuka: I'm an optimist. (Laughs)

Hayashida: Yes, I remember Mouri-san saying during the early stages of development that we shouldn't use the same game engine as in the New Super Mario Bros. series but rather create a new game engine that would serve as a foundation for future 2D Mario games. Thankfully, Tezuka-san also told us to prioritize content over schedule.

Tezuka: We wanted to create a game with much more to offer than ever before, so this time, we didn't set a fixed time period for development, which is usually decided before we kick off. To create something truly enjoyable, we decided to take our time and dedicate ample budget for development without having to worry about the production schedule. So at first, we only had a small group working on the development.

With a small number of people and no set deadline, I imagine the development team felt a bit uneasy. Did you have a clear direction of what you wanted to achieve?

Hayashida: Tezuka-san gave us the task of creating a Mario game full of hidden surprises and wonders.

Mouri: When I think back to the first time I played the original Super Mario Bros. (8) game, I remember feeling that it was full of hidden surprises and wonders. Coins would come out when you hit the blocks, and your body would grow bigger with Super Mushrooms. Back then, everything was new and packed with unexpected delights. However, now that the Super Mario games have been enjoyed by players for many years, those things have somehow become ordinary. That's why Tezuka-san's goal was to create moments that even modern players would find unexpected and wondrous.

(8) A game released in 1985 for the Nintendo Entertainment System. It is the first title in the Super Mario series, which continues today.

Hayashida: What used to be wondrous back then is no longer wondrous today, neither for players nor for us developers.

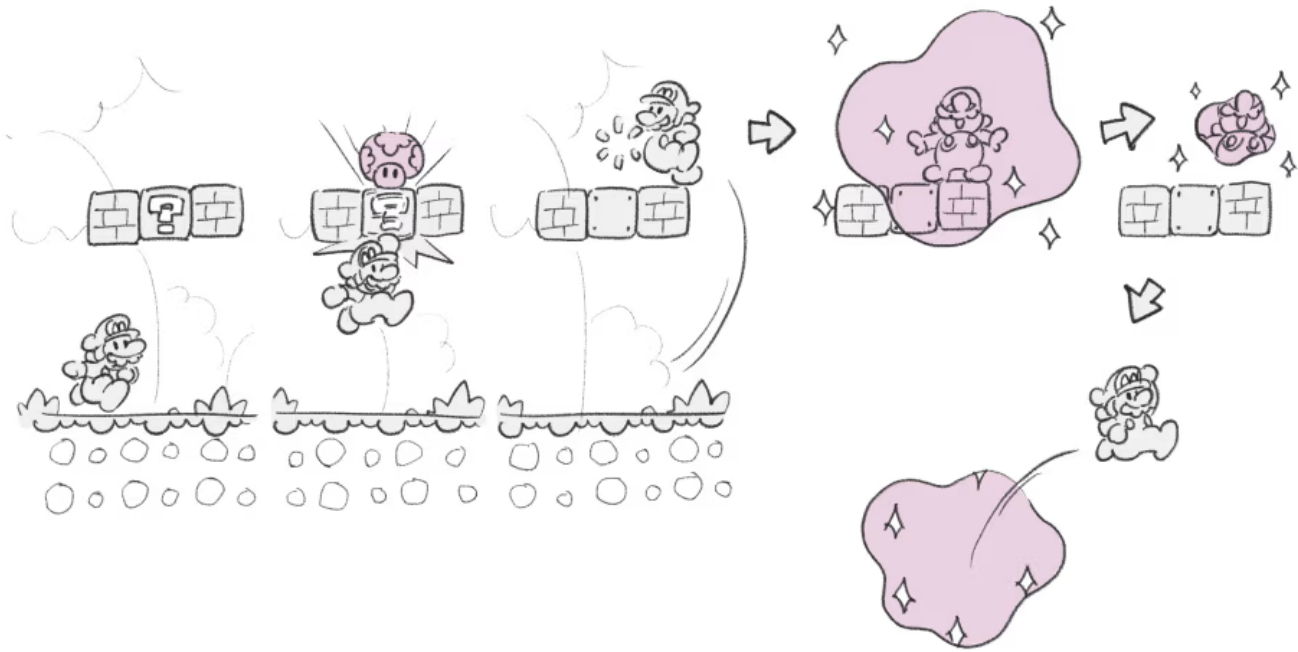
Mouri: But the reality of coming up with something that would elicit a sense of wonder from a modern audience was quite difficult. We did a lot of prototyping, but because the development team was small then, it took us time to find the core of what we wanted to achieve. Previous 2D Mario games featured variations of challenges that would scale up in difficulty as players progressed. This time, though, we decided not to focus on creating such variations but rather on offering a large number of surprises that we thought would be fun. Frankly speaking, I wanted to include at least one element in each course that would surprise or delight players. So I decided to consult Hayashida-san who had been involved in the development of 3D Mario games and ask him how he included such elements in *Super Mario Odyssey*.



programmers to designers and sound designers joined in and wrote down gameplay ideas on sticky notes, which could be unrelated to their field of expertise, and we made prototypes on the spot. There were just so many ideas. Before this interview, I counted the number of sticky notes we had, and there were over 2,000! (Laughs)

Wow, over 2,000! With so many ideas, could you find the core element you felt was right for this game?

Mouri: Sato-san proposed the idea of players warping to another world by collecting an item. This is what he came up with.



Mouri: When I was playing Super Mario Bros. on the NES, I was amazed that you could warp to different places. You could go underground by entering a pipe or go up to the sky by climbing up vines that appear when you hit a block. So I wanted to utilize this idea to create a game with new wonders.

I remember getting really excited about entering a pipe and warping somewhere else. What was Tezuka-san's reaction to that idea?

Mouri: Tezuka-san said, "Warping somewhere else would be no different from previous games. Can't we make it so that the course itself transforms without players having to warp?" I was like, "No, no, how is that even possible?" (Laughs)

Hayashida: I also thought it was asking the impossible to make the course itself move. (Laughs) But then I remembered that we had come up with the idea of twisting and bending the pipes, so we made a prototype, and it turned out to be quite an interesting gameplay mechanic.





Mouri: This got me thinking, let's make huge changes in a way that would have been unimaginable in previous 2D Mario games!

Twisting and bending pipes are certainly things we've not seen in past Super Mario games. Was this how the concept of Wonder started?

Mouri: Yes. We went through a lot of prototyping, and once we finally discovered the "core" of this game, the team became more confident and started to move forward. This is a rather drastic approach, but first, you've got to take everything to the extreme. If you think you've gone too far, you can make adjustments later.

Kondo: I also contributed a lot of suggestions at the idea-sharing session.

You shared ideas too, Kondo-san?

Kondo: Yes. I shared the idea of an eight-heads-tall, life-sized, live-action Mario humming along with the background music as he goes along.

Eight-heads-tall, life-sized Mario?!

Kondo: Yes. When he jumps, he says to himself, "Boing!" ...The idea was never used, though.

Everyone: (Laughs)

Kondo: I felt I had to take the lead in going to the extreme. (Laughs)

Maybe an eight-heads-tall, life-sized Mario was a step too far, but I see how you've expanded the gameplay through trial and error. However, if you take an idea too far, it could break the standards you've established over time for the world of 2D Mario games. Wasn't that a concern from an art-direction perspective?

Sato: Yes, there are some deviations from the rules of the Mario world we've seen in the past. For example, we all know pipes are solid, so we're confident that shells we kick will bounce back if they hit one. We also know that we can safely jump on pipes. Keeping this feeling of trust in a side-scrolling 2D Mario game was crucial.

Then came along the idea of twisting and bending pipes...

Sato: Yes. But we didn't want to give up on an idea that people had spent a lot of energy on, just because it wouldn't fit in and look right. So we took great pains to create a world that could incorporate this idea. We decided to incorporate this major transformation as a mysterious phenomenon called the "Wonder effect" and use unconventional visuals.

Hayashida: From then on, we held Wonder prototype meetings, where we selected ideas from the more-than-2,000 sticky notes and other materials produced in the idea-sharing session and created prototypes that matched the world of Wonder. Various ideas were incorporated into the game as we went along.



sense of complete change from the regular course. The course background music has also been redesigned. Instead of the analog synthesizer-like (9) sounds used in New Super Mario Bros. (10), we've incorporated the sounds of musical instruments and digital synthesizers (11) to introduce a musical genre that has never been heard in Mario history.

(9) An instrument that synthesizes sounds using electronic circuits. It generates simple sounds like those used in Super NES™ games.

(10) A Nintendo DS™ game released in May 2006. Simple controls using the +Control Pad and two (A and B) buttons are all it takes to experience this side-scrolling 2D action platformer.

(11) An instrument that synthesizes sound by processing sound data digitally using a computer.

Mouri: Looking back, I remember Kondo-san also talking about this "major transformation" in the idea-sharing meeting, even before we aligned on the concept of Wonder effects.

Kondo: Huh? I did?

Mouri: Yes, it was when the idea for Elephant Mario came up. We were experimenting with the water-spraying action and trying out ideas for sprinkling water, and Kondo-san said, "Wouldn't it be better to transform the entire screen more dramatically so that we get heavy rainfall?"

Kondo: Oh yes, I did say that.

Hayashida: I felt that transforming the entire screen fit in well with Tezuka-san's theme of "transformation." There's the world of Mario that Tezuka-san and Kondo-san have in mind, and if you don't have a clear understanding of their vision, it might seem like they're asking the impossible. However, there is a clear goal at the end.



Sato: I'm sure that from the producer's point of view, he knew that players wouldn't see much difference if we didn't do something as drastic as what he'd asked. I believe he didn't want us to do just what we were told but rather to come up with our own ideas that aligned with his vision. I was always thinking about his intent as I worked on the game.

Mouri: In hindsight, "asking the impossible" was exactly what we needed.

Read more in [Part 2: Bringing the details to life](#)





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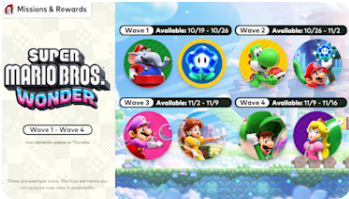
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Part 2: Bringing the details to life

Sato: We're often asked about the film's influence on the game, but we didn't hear anything about the film's content during development. I think Tezuka-san and Kondo-san were the only members here who knew the details.

I see. So the new elements are unrelated to the movie?

Sato: Yes. New Super Mario Bros. was the first 2D Mario game to use 3D models. The adoption of 3D models provided a natural change and was seen as a significant evolution in 2006 when it was released. In addition to the visual changes we incorporated back then, we wanted to implement more engaging and functional ways of using 3D models in this 2D platformer. Therefore, at an early stage of development, we set ourselves the goal of discovering how this could be achieved.

Tezuka: During development, we didn't know when the movie would be released, but we were sure some people would play the game because they watched the movie. This is why we were conscious of creating a game that wouldn't disappoint them. So for this game, we dedicated ample budget and time to create the characters with even more care and attention and in greater detail.

Hayashida: Also, with Nintendo Switch's technology, we were able to make movements and facial expressions more dynamic than before. The number of joints (12) has also increased considerably. The more joints there are, the broader the range of motion and the greater the variety of movements that can be expressed.

(12) Joints connect individual parts in a 3D model.

Sato: Both joints and animations have more than doubled in number since the previous title. Facial expressions that are difficult to express using joints were created by replacing the models with new ones.

Even the movements of the small characters were depicted in great detail, and I thought that was really cute.

Sato: The game's animation has the role of communicating the character's state to the player. In this game, we revisited Mario's iconic poses from the days of pixel graphics. We took a look at each of them, including a jumping motion with arms extended and a sudden stop after running. As a result, we believe we've been able to create characters that leave a strong impression.



Kondo: I remember being very surprised at how the expressiveness of the animation kept improving during development.

Sato: However, while it was good that the characters were more expressive, another challenge surfaced when we tried to turn their faces toward players to show their expressions. It's a well-known story within the company that Miyamoto-san said designing Mario's nose to be big back in the day of the very first pixelated Mario made it easier to see which direction Mario was facing. But if we set Mario's nose to face the direction of travel, like we used to, with a modern 3D model, you wouldn't be able to see his facial expressions.

So by trying to make it easier for players to see where Mario's headed, you make it impossible for them to see the facial expressions you worked so hard to create.



where they're headed.

So you made the direction their body's facing indicate their direction of travel, while their face, showing their expressions, is easily visible from the player's point of view.

Sato: Yes. So here's the final outcome.



Oh my, look at this Mario facing toward us...

Sato: I know. If you look at the picture on the right, you'll see that Mario's face is distorted when seen from the direction he's traveling toward. However, if you look at the picture on the left, you can see how Mario appears on-screen. During gameplay, players can see both the direction Mario is heading and his facial expressions. In fact, we've made these kinds of adjustments not only to the facial expressions but to the entire body.

I see. So you needed to adjust how Mario's 3D model appears so that the visual is optimized during gameplay.

Hayashida: I think the sound effects have also evolved greatly, along with the advancement of facial expressions and movements.

Kondo: I agree. We gave each character a distinctive jump sound and deliberately created sounds that would help convey the characters' movements to players. Also, we wanted to give it a fresh feel by integrating the sounds of musical instruments into the sound effects, so in this game, we used an electric ukulele made of Yezo spruce for Mario's jump sound. Using strings to accompany the traditional action of running before jumping to increase jump distance has enabled us to add sounds of varying dynamics to better express the feeling of ascending. This is the first time the jump sound changes based on how the player jumps, just like how string instruments make different sounds depending on how strongly or softly a musician plucks the strings.

So advancements not only in graphics but also in sound have had a significant impact on the gameplay experience.

Sato: But I'm sure many of the sound effects must have been difficult to create because this game has more movement patterns than previous titles.

Kondo: Many of the movements weren't in past titles, so we couldn't always simply apply previous sound effects. Let's take, for example, a character entering a pipe.





In this game, the character always performs an action before they enter a pipe. So when we triggered the sound effect right as the player pressed the button, as we'd always done in previous games, it didn't match what was happening on-screen. So we ended up readjusting the timing for this sound effect. It was fun to look closely at the characters' expressions and movements and notice those kinds of details.

Hayashida: As I tested the prototype every day, I tried different ways of playing the game. Sometimes I played like a beginner and sometimes like an advanced player. Every day, there were surprises and discoveries that made me think, "I never knew these sounds or visuals were in the game!"

You wouldn't have made those discoveries if not so much effort had gone into creating the game with such details.

Sato: You're right. Since we knew we had ample budget to develop the game, we didn't have to worry about the amount of resources we'd spend to craft even small details.

Speaking of which, it seems that not only playable characters but also enemies have become much more expressive in this game.

Hayashida: You can see Goombas greeting each other as they meet or sleeping peacefully, for example.





Sato: Even before development on Super Mario Bros. Wonder was confirmed, we were looking to broaden the range of expressions that enemies had. It wasn't possible to completely change the behavior of the well-known enemies in this game without altering the gameplay, but we wanted to be able to demonstrate to fans that we'd made some adjustments to them.



Tezuka: Such trial and error in character design inspired those in charge of course creation to make a world that matched those designs.

Hayashida: Since the designers had created fed-up expressions for Goombas caught in gaps, we thought we'd better develop nice gaps for the





Were the developers able to discuss such matters anytime across the entire team, regardless of their roles and responsibilities?

Tezuka: We've always valued team-wide discussions, but remote work may have also had a major impact. Since meetings now took place online, we no longer had to limit the number of participants due to limited space in meeting rooms, so we made it a rule to open meetings to the entire development team so that anyone could join at any time.

Hayashida: We let members join online meetings without turning on their cameras so that they could just listen in while multitasking. I'm glad we were able to share information widely across the team in this way. Of course, there were difficulties developing a game in an unfamiliar, work-from-home environment, but we were able to take advantage of the situation and work on new approaches.

I see. It's certainly difficult to get dozens of people into a physical meeting room, but any number of people can join online. It sounds like these online meetings were something people could casually listen to while working on other things—a bit like background music. (Laughs)

Sato: We talked about the evolution of hardware earlier—I heard that someone once asked Miyamoto-san why Mario takes damage when he bumps into a Goomba from the side in the original Super Mario Bros. game. Apparently, he answered, "It's because the Goombas bite him."





Mouri: Even if that was what was happening, due to hardware limitations at the time, the graphics weren't capable of showing that much detail.

Sato: That's right. But now we are able to show those expressions.

Hayashida: Goombas have a biting expression the moment they do damage.



Sato: Yes, and when they bite you, they'll do it with a smile on their face! (Laughs)





Sato: During the development of New Super Mario Bros., I simply thought these were the established rules for expressing these characters. But when I heard this story, I thought, "We can actually make these expressions come alive with today's hardware. I want to bring those details to life." This illustrates the evolution that the development team was able to accomplish with this game.

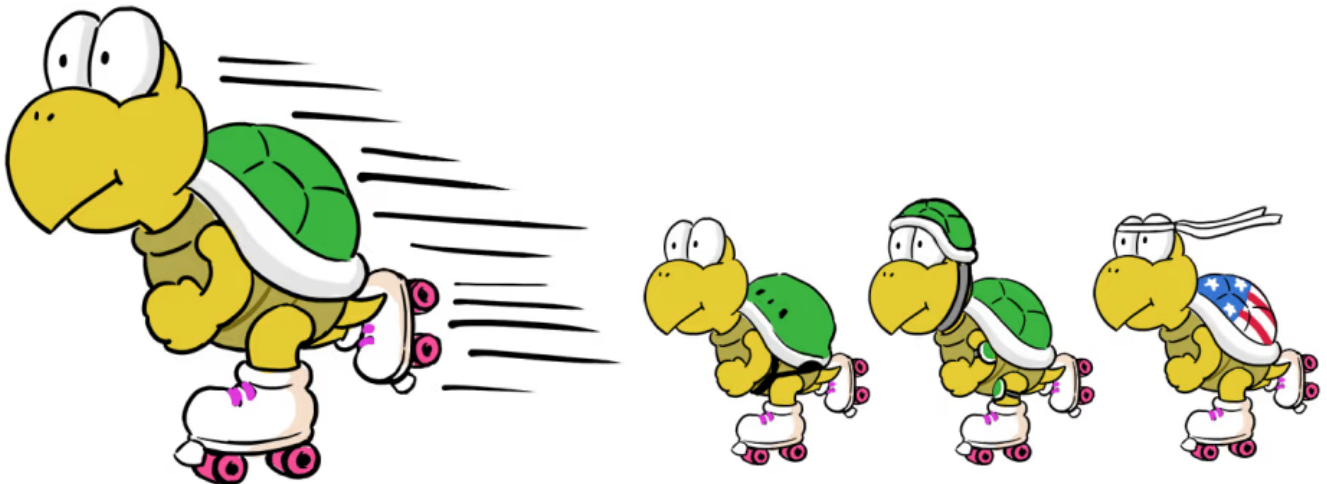
Hayashida: Speaking of evolution, you'll see new foes called Rolla Koopas in this game. (Laughs) The first course in Super Mario World (13) for the Super Nintendo Entertainment System (Super NES) featured Unshelled Koopas going down a slope and then later you see them flying around with capes. With the transition from NES to Super NES, developers apparently discussed how the look of the Koopa Troopas would evolve, and that was the end result. (Laughs)





(13) A Super NES game released in August 1991 in North America. In this side-scrolling 2D platformer, the adventure unfolds in Dinosaur Land.

Sato: With this anecdote in mind, we were brainstorming during the idea-sharing session how we should express the evolution of this well-known enemy in this game, and one of the designers came up with the idea of making the Koopa Troopas roll around on roller skates. (Laughs)



That's an interesting turn of events. (Laughs) Speaking of major changes in appearance, the new transformation Elephant Mario, which appeared in the trailer, left quite an impression. Where did that idea come from?

Mouri: Elephant Mario was another idea that came out of the idea-sharing session, but before we arrived at this idea, we first discussed what kind of gameplay we wanted and what we needed to do to achieve it. First, we wanted to make the body bigger. Having a bigger body makes stepping on enemies, hitting blocks, and collecting coins easier, adding ease of play. Also, we wanted the characters to be able to hit blocks from the side and to spray water. We thought these two features would provide more variety to the gameplay. What checks all three of those boxes? An elephant, of course! (Laughs)

I assumed that the design for Elephant Mario came first, but now I realize it was designed based on the gameplay you wanted to implement. And tell me, this water-spraying action is a gameplay mechanic that has never been seen in previous 2D Mario games, right?



Mouri-san. I remember spraying quite a bit of water in that game. (Laughs)



(14) A Nintendo GameCube™ game released in August 2002 in North America. Mario has a water pump strapped to his back, and players can use it to perform actions such as splashing enemies with water and flying.

Mouri: That gameplay mechanic was fun and unique.

Hayashida: It was great to work with Mouri-san once again after 21 years to create another Mario game where we can spray water. (Laughs)

I see. When I think of a Mario game that involves the action of spraying water, Super Mario Sunshine certainly comes to mind, and Hayashida-san and Mouri-san were both involved in the development of that game.

Tezuka: Just when I was thinking that something was missing, Mouri-san suggested Elephant Mario, and I liked it. The "boing" sound it makes when you hit something with your trunk is quite impactful. I also like that coins appear when you spray water.

Hayashida: Another idea we had was to blow up shells with the trunk. We gave it a lot of thought, thinking, "Having an inflated shell would be cute, but how can we use this large shell to make the game more interesting?" After much deliberation, we ended up not going for it...





Sato: We were also saying that an elephant would be powerful enough to move through the course with several characters on its back. (Laughs)

Hayashida: But the idea of being able to carry big things is still there.



Kondo: We also worked on the sound in various ways to make this new elephant transformation distinctive. When a character collects an Elephant Fruit and transforms, you hear "wowie zowie," a phrase unique to the elephant transformation that wasn't in past games. In addition, the background music's arrangement changes when a character transforms into an elephant. We've also paid a lot of attention to the sounds of footsteps, jumps,



Kondo: The sound effects of the elephant footsteps were the very first things we created. For us, the elephant transformation was that special. We came up with tons of different ideas for the gameplay, design, characters, and sound, and we reviewed every single one of them. It was within the final six months to a year of development that a unified direction for the game took shape as we considered its world and story. I remember thinking, "Now here's a team that knows how to put things together."

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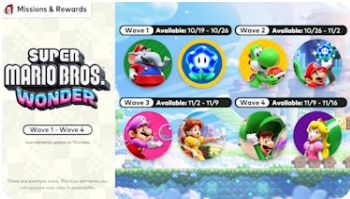
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10/18/23 Nintendo Switch



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Ask the Developer Vol. 11, Super Mario Bros. Wonder—Part 3

- This article has been translated from the original Japanese content.
- Some of the images and videos shown in text were created during development.

In this eleventh volume of Ask the Developer, an interview series in which Nintendo developers convey in their own words Nintendo's thoughts about creating products and the specific points they are particular about, we're talking to the developers behind the [Super Mario Bros.™ Wonder](#) game for the [Nintendo Switch™](#) system, which launches on Friday, **October 20**.

Check out the rest of the interview:

- [Part 1](#)
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Part 3: Complete it your way

Hayashida: We discussed a lot about what kind of 2D Mario would be appropriate for this day and age.

Tezuka: We ventured into this project with a sense of crisis from the beginning.

A sense of crisis?

Tezuka: Compared to 3D Mario games, 2D Mario games may seem to have less visual variation and be more challenging to complete. But then we made a small discovery when developing the smartphone app [Super Mario Run](#) (15). One of the development team members who wasn't that skilled at Mario platformers told us, "I want to see more of the game, but I can't progress because I'm not that good at this type of game."

(15) A smartphone app released in December, 2016. Tap Mario as he continues to run, and aim for Bowser's Castle.

Sato: I heard that, in the course where you need to jump on mushroom platforms consecutively at the start, this person kept falling into the pit.

Tezuka: We didn't think it was that challenging, so we hadn't realized you'd feel discouraged from continuing the game if it felt too difficult. So we started to think about what we could do to make players want to advance. Then we thought, maybe there isn't enough freedom. For example, I feel that Super Mario Odyssey is designed so that all players can reach the ending, no matter how they progress through the game.

Hayashida: I think that this gameplay is adapted to modern times. Tezuka-san suggested we could perhaps use 3D Mario platformers as a reference point, since their gameplay is designed for players to reach the end.

I see. Here, too, you took inspiration from how 3D Mario games are developed.

Tezuka: I felt that 2D Mario games often had the reputation of being unforgiving. Compared to 3D Mario games, just one mistimed action can lead to a bigger mistake, since you have fewer options in terms of movement. In this game, we've changed that. We've designed it so that players can conquer the game with their ideas and use their heads, not just their skills, to progress.

Hayashida: With all that in mind, we felt that a 2D Mario game adapted to the times would be one that you could complete your way. For example, up until now, 2D Mario games have been in a format where players complete each course in sequence. But in this title, players who want a challenge can start with a difficult course, and beginners can start with an easier one. Each course has its difficulty indicated too.



We even implemented a method used in 3D Mario games by which you can unlock specific courses with key items that you collect. That key item is what's called the Wonder Seed.





You can obtain Wonder Seeds upon reaching the end of each course, but even if you can't complete a course, you can still buy them at the Poplin Shop by collecting flower coins.



Mouri: We've also increased the number of playable characters to 12, and players can freely choose what ability to add to their own character.

Yoshi and Nabbit have slightly different abilities from the others in that neither takes damage, but Mario, Luigi, Peach, Daisy, and the others play the same, right? Was that intentional?



choose Luigi. We wanted to remove that in this game so that players can pick their favorite character and ability. So, we kept characters and abilities separate by implementing a badge system, where players can attach a badge that has the ability they want to their favorite character.



Tezuka: The badge system is packed with Mouri-san's passion.

Mouri: We ended up with over 20 different badges. These were the top picks from more than 50 prototypes. In fact, if a specific ability is tied to a character, players must choose that particular character depending on the course. So, it was difficult to apply an edgy ability. Since we were able to separate out abilities in the form of badges, not only can players equip badges that make it easier to clear courses, but we could also create abilities that let skilled players do challenge runs. For example, a badge that makes you run nonstop or one that makes your character invisible to both you and enemies.

So the freedom to switch badges broadens the gameplay possibilities, right?

Mouri: Some badges alter actions, like jumping higher after crouching, while others are aimed at beginners, like one that automatically bounces your character back out of pits. Switching badges lets you experience the same course differently or at varying difficulty levels. I think the game is designed to be cleared more easily, even for players who used to quit 2D Mario games halfway because they found them too difficult. It also led to a new gameplay element to collect badges. During multiplayer (16), different gameplay styles become available, like boldly choosing badges that require some skill. Everyone can become invisible, for example. (Laughs)

(16) Additional accessories may be required for multiplayer mode. Sold separately.

Hayashida: Come to think of it, at one point, Tezuka-san said, "I wonder if we can create a mechanism that lets you freely change the difficulty level during play." At the time, I thought, "That's impossible," but I guess the badge system does the job, so it somehow worked out in the end. (Laughs)

Mouri: Tezuka-san initially asked whether we could place a bar on the screen to adjust the difficulty level on the spot. I thought, there's no way... (Laughs)

Do you mean the difficulty level of the entire course would change in real time? Indeed, that's hard to imagine. (Laughs)

Tezuka: Well, you never know, right? Maybe it'll be in the next game.

Everyone: (Laughs)

Sato: I always had to be on my toes, since I never knew when Tezuka-san might show up and ask the impossible. (Laughs)





Mouri: Tezuka-san also once asked, "Can't we have live commentary?" I had absolutely no clue what he meant. (Laughs) But I interpreted it as a desire for a new experience, even if it's not necessarily in the form of live commentary.

When you say live commentary, do you mean like in soccer or baseball games? You considered doing that in a Mario game?

Hayashida: We actually spent about six months seriously developing live commentary. We tried adding voices to match the player's actions. Even though we'd added various voices, questions like, "Who's doing this commentary?" started to pop up amongst the team. Something about it just didn't feel right. (Laughs)

Tezuka: I was quite a fan of it. (Laughs)

Mouri: Even the team was evenly split between those in favor and those against. (Laughs) The default voice was very generic, like a newscaster, but you had the option to switch it to a Tsundere (17) commentary.

(17) Tsundere is an adjective term in Japanese that is used to describe a personality or a person who usually has a cold and harsh attitude but on the other hand shows a glimpse of affection.

Wait, a Tsundere commentary?

Mouri: In fact, according to our play test records, quite a few people were switching to the Tsundere commentary. (Laughs)

Everyone: (Laughs)

Tezuka: But if we were to do this commentary feature seriously, just the process of creating voice variations alone would've involved a tremendous amount of work. So, unfortunately, we had to let it go.

Still, it would've been a shame to shut down the whole experiment. So we brought in an additional team member to dedicate themselves to this feature full-time.

Mouri: Around the same time, there was a discussion about setting the game in the Flower Kingdom, and we were able to incorporate the idea of live commentary in the form of Talking Flowers that would match the game's world. It's a version of live commentary that fits the world of Mario.

Hayashida: It's nice that you're never lonely when the Talking Flowers are there. If you were all alone in a course, it might feel like it was you against the world, but the Talking Flowers speak to you at just the right time.

Sato: They've got some funny lines like, "Make sure you're getting your veggies!" as a parent might say. (Laughs) I think it's a fun experience for those watching the player too.

Indeed, the Talking Flowers give hints during the course and say what the player might already be thinking. I think that's going to make it feel



Tezuka: We thought the gameplay might be more enjoyable if the Talking Flowers speak to you and you can resonate with what they're saying. Of course, there's an option to turn off the chatter, but we hope as many people as possible will give it a listen.

Mouri: And by making them something that exists in the course, we were able to create a new type of Mario gameplay. For example, searching for a hidden Talking Flower or catching a glimpse of one above you and working out how you can reach it.

Kondo: While discussing difficulty levels and live commentary, there was mention of Tezuka-san "asking the impossible." I felt like there might have been a disparity between the world of Mario that Tezuka-san and I envisioned and the world of Mario that the rest of the team had in mind. The developers found creative ways to pack every gameplay idea they could think of into each of the Mario games up until now, within the specifications and limitations of each successive hardware. For the development staff who grew up playing Mario games, they see the world depicted in those games as the world of Mario. And they try to carry that over to future games. But the world of Mario that Tezuka-san and I think of is actually much broader, and we're allowed to incorporate anything we think would be fun. So maybe that's why they thought we were "asking the impossible."



I see. So the world of Mario is a safe place to keep exploring lots of new possibilities. By the way, you mentioned that the sound team also joined in brainstorming new gameplay ideas. Was that unusual?

Kondo: Whenever a new member joins the sound team, I always tell them, "You may be in charge of music or sound effects, but above all else, you're a game creator, so bring various ideas to the table, and if there's anything in the game that you find strange, don't hesitate to speak up." This time, we were able to work together more closely and felt that we were truly involved in the game's creation.

Tezuka: The sound team has limited resources, so in many cases, we have them join from the middle of development when we need them, rather than from the beginning. Plus, it's impossible to imagine what kinds of sounds to create unless the art direction is established to a certain degree.

Kondo: Until now, we've typically joined during the latter half of development, and even if I thought it would be fun for the visuals to change in response to the sound, it wasn't something we could really implement. So I was itching for a chance to do it. In the previous game too, I joined in the final phase of development, so the most I could do was make Goombas jump in time with the background music.





We got involved from the early development stages of this game to come up with gameplay ideas, and the programmers also worked together to create prototypes for sound-related areas.

When you acquire a Wonder Flower, the landscape changes suddenly and dramatically midcourse. That must have had quite an impact on the sound too.

Kondo: Yes, it did. I've always wanted to try something along the lines of having the entire course come alive like a musical. To begin with, we tested it out by having Piranha Plants come out of their pipes in sync with the music, and the level designers created a course where the pipes and the platforms move. This went down well with the development team, so we adjusted it so that various enemies and stage elements would move to the rhythm. But the level designers didn't know much about beat or meter, and the sound team wasn't familiar with level design (18), so it was hard going.

(18) Designing a course by placing objects and such.

Tezuka: The sound leads and level designers spent a lot of time adjusting that, didn't they?

Kondo: We held briefing sessions for both parties, and the sound team had a chance to get hands-on with the level design. And by actually stepping into each other's shoes, we deepened our understanding of each other's areas of expertise.

Sato: You did a lot of tests at the Wonder prototype meeting too, didn't you? In fact, there were times when a new Wonder gameplay element was born from sound.

Kondo: Yes, the "Ninji Jump Party."





When various things started moving to the music on-screen, it made me want to move along with it too. (Laughs) That's how we came up with a course where you make your character jump on every fourth beat.

Sato: This was also very well received and gave birth to the Rhythm Jump Badge so that the same thing can be enjoyed on other courses.

Tezuka: We had the theme of creating a foundation for future 2D Mario games, and I actually feel that the changes we've made to our development approach have borne fruit.

I see. So there was a significant change—or indeed a wonder—in the development process, as you applied methods used in 3D Mario games to a 2D Mario game and achieved cross-functional collaboration with the sound team to create new gameplay.

Read more in [Part 4: A casual connection](#)





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Part 4: A casual connection

(19) Any Nintendo Switch Online membership (sold separately) and Nintendo Account required for online features. Membership auto-renews after initial term at the then-current price unless canceled. Not available in all countries. Internet access required for online features. Terms apply.

nintendo.com/switch-online

Mouri: From the initial concept, we wanted to develop a Mario game that's also fun to play online. However, while playing online with people from around the world can be fun, we believe there are also some challenges. For example, in competitive games, more-skilled players can have multiple wins and feel satisfied, while newcomers give up early because they keep losing. In co-op games, those who aren't skilled at games can drag the team down. Also, there's a very small percentage of players who behave inappropriately and cause trouble. I've always wanted to create fun online gameplay, free from those sorts of worries. That's how we landed on the key phrase "a casual connection."

A casual connection? Can you elaborate on that?

Mouri: Basically, you can enjoy the game as if you're playing solo. You don't have to be on standby while you're matched up with other players; matching takes place automatically behind the scenes during single player, so there's no waiting around. If someone in the world is playing the same course as you at the same time, you can connect and play online together. And so, we came up with ideas to form this casual connection with players worldwide. We call other online players "live player shadows," and if you greet them, they might greet you back, give you an extra item if they have one, or even help you when you make a mistake. But they can't attack or disturb you. We wanted to create gameplay where only things that benefit the player can happen, and that resulted in the current design.

Indeed, with the current design, you don't have to worry about someone else being there and can focus on enjoying the course.

Mouri: Because you can connect with players around the world, we thought it'd be good to have lots of characters to choose from. This is one of the reasons why we decided to have the 12-character lineup from the initial stage of development. Even the world map is designed with the idea that players from all over the world keep popping up and wander around together freely.

I have the impression that ever since New Super Mario Bros. Wii, 2D Mario games have been associated with the idea of "playing together." Did you make a conscious effort in this title to demonstrate the evolution of this concept?

Mouri: Yes, we were very conscious of creating a variety of ways to enjoy multiplayer. "Not only can you enjoy online multiplayer, but up to four players can play together in local co-op (20) as in the previous titles, and as a new feature of local multiplayer, if someone is playing as Yoshi, you can even ride on their back.

(20) Additional accessories may be required for multiplayer mode. Sold separately.

Hayashida: In this title, Yoshis can carry other players on their backs, so I'd be especially happy to see parents and kids playing together. If parents are better at games than their kids, they can play as Yoshi and carry their kids on their backs.

Mouri: No one has to fight over who gets to be the princess this time, since Peach and Daisy are both playable characters! Those are the sorts of things we paid attention to so that everyone can play together.



In the [Ask the Developer interview featuring Pikmin 4](#), I remember Miyamoto-san commenting that he'd love to see the game being played in the living room. Listening to everyone's stories today, I can imagine this game being played by families in the living room too.

Mouri: Yes, I agree. I'd love to see everyone playing this game together with their family as well. I hope newcomers try joining in as Yoshi or Nabbit, who don't take damage. If you play in local co-op, lives are shared among the group, so you can play the game with a sense of togetherness to help one another. Even if one person makes a mistake, your group won't lose a life immediately as long as somebody comes to their rescue by the count of five, during which they appear as a ghost. I think it's become easier to play with others.

Tezuka: Looking at the team members playing this game, everyone was having fun and shouting with excitement, even more so than I've seen in previous multiplayer games, and this filled me with confidence that this feature can be highly recommended.

Mouri: If you're playing in local co-op, discussing and choosing a badge together adds to the fun. You can [ramp up the challenge with badges like Invisibility or Jet Run](#). Conversely, it can also be fun to discuss with everybody the most effective badge to take on a challenging course. Being able to choose any course on the world map may be another exciting element. I also recommend being bold and picking a challenging course or a badge that ups the difficulty for multiplayer and enjoying the chaos that ensues.

I see that you paid a lot of attention to making this a fun multiplayer experience as well as creating an enjoyable casual connection online with players around the world. Let's conclude this volume with a closing remark from everyone.

Kondo: This new Mario title has so much new gameplay, and I think we accomplished Tezuka-san's goal of creating a foundation for future 2D Mario games. From a sound perspective, there's a badge called Rhythm Jump where you jump on every fourth beat. This feels satisfying in any course, so I hope everyone will try it out. And lastly, I think the casual connection during online play is the most significant innovation we've made for this title. I have a [Nintendo Switch Online](#) membership, but I'm no good at competing, so I've mainly been playing NES games that don't involve online matches... (Laughs) But with this casual connection, I feel more comfortable stepping into the world of online this time.

Sato: We've made each character's facial expressions, including Mario's, much richer to convey their charm. If you look closely, I'm sure you'll keep discovering new things, like, "Oh, they move like that too?" And the adventure takes place in the all-new location of the Flower Kingdom, so I hope everyone will enjoy a fresh 2D Mario experience. I hope you'll pay attention to those details as well, and it would be great if you got more interested in 2D Mario games and the Mario characters as a result.

Hayashida: In the same year that Nintendo Switch launched, the 3D Mario title Super Mario Odyssey was released, and I'm sure for some, that game was their first Mario experience. I hope this game will be a good opportunity for those players to discover the fun of 2D Mario games. Personally, I think we've created a game where the surprises keep on coming and the fun never stops—and one which will satisfy even those with happy memories of playing 3D Mario games. Also, the world map for this game is in 3D, and it's open for exploration. Some team members were also involved in the development of 3D Mario games, and we worked on the map together. So I hope everyone will spend some time exploring it. What's more, there's a hidden character who appears in some of the recent 3D Mario games, so please try looking for them.

Mouri: Above all, I really hope everyone will play this game their way. Whether you play solo, in local co-op, or online, how you play is entirely up to you. You're free to choose any course and whether or not you activate the Wonder effect during the course. And, naturally, it's up to you which badge to equip. If you find it too difficult, try picking Yoshi or Nabbit, who don't take any damage, or you could go online, where I'm sure you'll find other players who'll help you out since it's only possible for them to do things that benefit you. Please give it a go and try to clear the game.

Tezuka: As for the online play, there's a Free 7-day Trial of Nintendo Switch Online Individual Membership (21) for new customers, so I hope you'll experience it for yourself. We've talked about 2D Mario versus 3D Mario, but I hope people will ditch any preconceptions they may have and give it a go. We will continue to create Mario gameplay, regardless of whether it's 2D or 3D, so I hope everyone will continue to enjoy it. And also, we were talking about my tendency to ask the impossible (laughs), but as Kondo-san mentioned, in order to create fun gameplay within the limitations of the hardware, it takes great creativity and ingenuity to go beyond those constraints. I believe fun gameplay is what comes out of such an environment. I hope to continue creating games while building a good relationship with other team members so that my "impossible" suggestions don't end up as such, but rather create opportunities for everyone to pitch in with their own solutions. Well, that last comment was directed at the development team members. (Laughs)

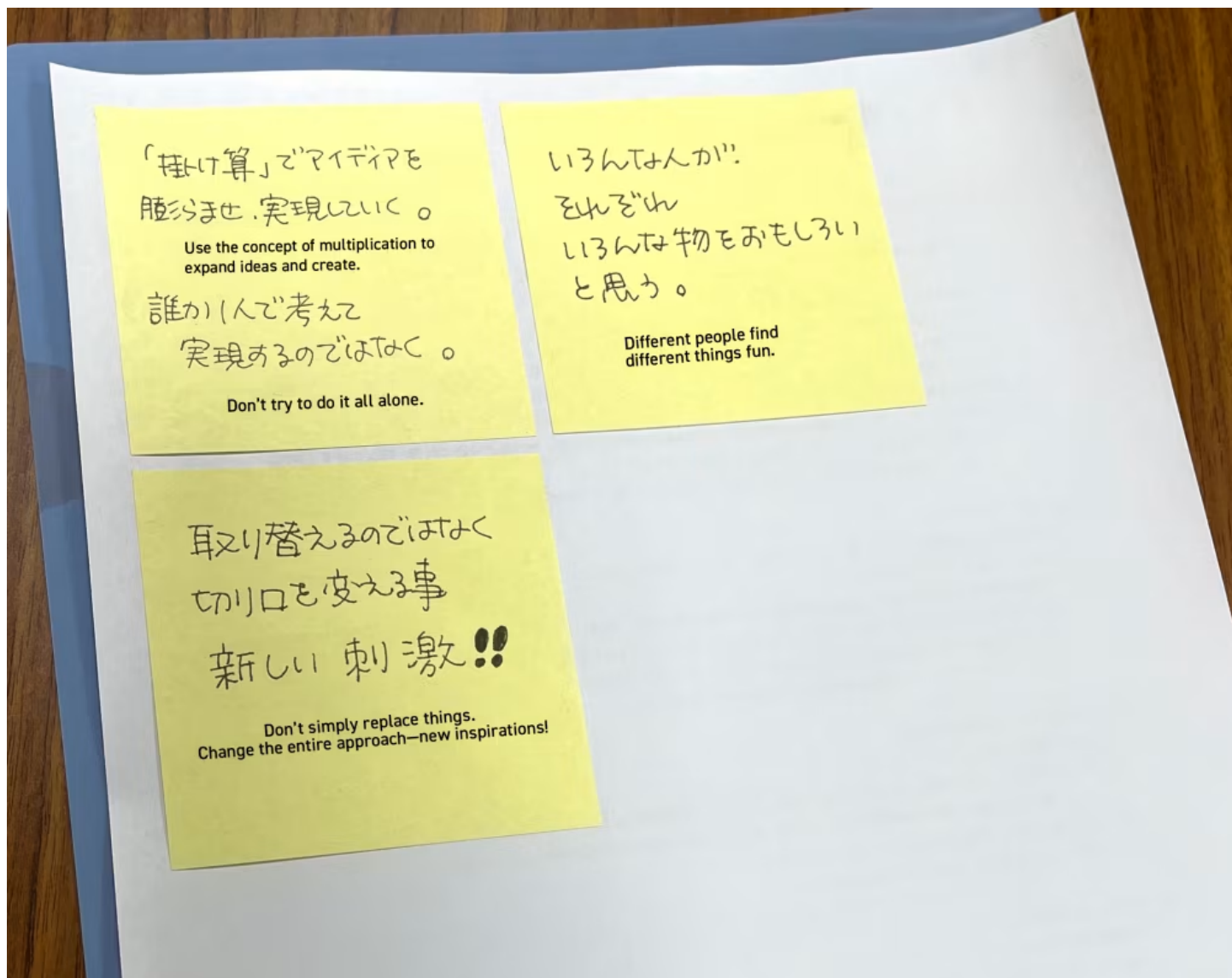
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Sato: That reminds me, I wrote down some of the things that Tezuka-san said during development on sticky notes and kept them on my desk. I brought them with me today.

Tezuka: Really? (Laughs)

Sato: I think what he just said is related to what's on the sticky notes.





Tezuka: Yeah, all of what's written here has been achieved!

Hayashida: Curiously enough, when you bounce ideas off each other, it leads to even more ideas. I've grown confident that there's still so much more Mario gameplay that we can create.

Tezuka: Mario games have a bright future ahead of them!

The world of Mario has evolved in this iteration with new changes and discoveries. I look forward to enjoying it with everyone. Thank you very much!





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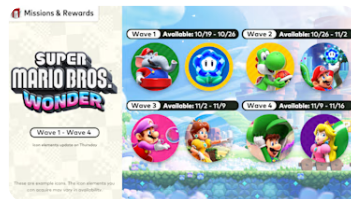
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